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COUNTRY PROGRAMMES AND RELATED MATTERS

Assistance to Myanmar

Note by the Administrator

I. PURPOSE

1. The present report contains (a) an overview of the assistance provided to Myanmar since 1993 in accordance with Governing Council decision 93/21 and (b) proposals that the Executive Board may wish to adopt for further assistance to Myanmar within the framework of decision 93/21.

II. INTRODUCTION

2. In its decision 93/21, the Governing Council, recognizing there were critical humanitarian and basic human development needs of all the people of Myanmar at the community level, authorized an expenditure of up to $18 million from fifth cycle indicative planning figure (IPF) allocations to continue UNDP assistance during the 18-month period to December 1994. A further $7.5 million was carried over from fourth-cycle reallocated IPF resources. The Council decided that all future assistance from UNDP and related funds to Myanmar should be clearly targeted towards programmes having grass-roots level impact in a sustainable manner in the areas of primary health care, the environment, HIV/AIDS, training and education, and food security. It was also decided that assistance to Myanmar would be approved on a project-by-project basis.

3. At its second regular session 1994, the Executive Board agreed that the 15 projects being implemented responded fully to the mandate as outlined in Governing Council decision 93/21 and should be carried through to completion. It was understood that the issue of future programming for Myanmar could be

taken up at an appropriate time. Myanmar has been categorized as a least developed country since 1987.

III. PROGRESS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

4. A mid-term review and assessment of the 15 projects (described in their totality as a human development initiative (HDI)) was undertaken by an independent team of consultants, AGRODEV Canada Inc., in December 1994 and January 1995. The Harvard Institute of International Development also undertook several studies on selected aspects of HDI. Various other assessments, especially those carried out at a sectoral level by United Nations specialized agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Myanmar, have provided insights into the implementation process of HDI.

5. HDI has been under implementation for two years. Most of its resources have been allocated to seven townships in the Dry Zone, Shan State and Ayeryawaddy Delta (the term "township" in Myanmar refers to an administrative unit of 200 to 300 villages and small towns) while a smaller share has been allocated to seven townships in the Chin and Rakhine States. Projects have targeted rural areas almost exclusively. An effort has been made to focus project activities on the poorer groups of the population and those who are most vulnerable and at risk.

6. AGRODEV Canada Inc. stated in its report that the substance and content of the projects are in full conformity with Governing Council decision 93/21 and that they address urgent humanitarian needs and are focused on the areas approved, i.e., primary health care, the environment, HIV/AIDS, training and education, and food security. The consultants found that the three objectives that flow from Council decision 93/21, namely (a) direct impact, through improvements in community social and productive infrastructure; (b) indirect impact, through capacity-building at the village level; and (c) indirect impact, through capacity-building at the level of local support agencies, are all addressed through HDI.

7. It is still too early to make a definitive assessment of the impact of HDI activities in their entirety at the grass-roots level. While all projects are still ongoing and yet to be completed, there is a visible impact at the village level of many HDI activities. Primary health care services have been improved in the selected townships; school buildings have been upgraded, and the provision of textbooks and other school supplies have made an important difference to the educational situation; primary school teachers and village level health-workers have been trained; access to water and sanitation facilities have improved in many villages; an important impact has been made on the environment through improvements in watershed, mangrove and community-forestry management. Important new techniques have been transferred, especially in watershed and mangrove management through integrated approaches in their development. The innovative development of wood stoves has generated an extensive popular appeal in some of the dry zone townships; improvements have been made in the food security of poorer groups; and income-generating activities have been stimulated. In all these activities, there has been a

strong focus on the role of women and on improving their contribution to village-level activities.

8. Significant efforts have been made to ensure the adoption of a genuine participatory approach at the local level in implementing HDI activities. Grass-roots organizations have been intensively engaged in undertaking needs assessment, identifying priorities and designing local-level activities. Women's groups have been particularly associated in income-generating activities. National and international NGOs have played an important part both in project design and in implementing selected activities. Township and village-level administrative authorities have cooperated extensively in facilitating project implementation and service delivery.

9. In managing these projects, considerable coordination and cooperation have been achieved, especially at the township and village levels even though 15 different projects are being implemented by five United Nations specialized agencies. The township programme assistants (TPAs), a cadre of 28 local persons (many are former United Nations Volunteers (UNV) specialists) have been instrumental to a considerable extent in generating enthusiasm and facilitating implementation of tasks at the village and township levels.

10. While the overall and sectoral progress of projects can be deemed successful and imaginative, there are shortcomings emerging - primarily from the short duration and time frame assigned to HDI. This has necessitated the quick design of projects and selection of activities that lend themselves to early impact. Sustainable capacity and organizational building at the village level cannot be easily accommodated within such a time frame. HDI largely targets poorer groups of the population although further refinements are required to make a greater impact on the very poor in the rural areas. There is also scope for significant improvements in management structures, primarily at the local level, so that more extensive linkages can be established between project activities, which could generate greater synergy.

IV. FUTURE NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

11. Based on the experience of HDI so far, the country office, in consultation with the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, has initiated an extensive process of consultation and analysis with a view to developing a package of proposals for an extended phase of HDI. AGRODEV Canada Inc. and the Harvard Institute for International Development have made several proposals for its future orientation. Consultations have taken place with all United Nations specialized agencies resident in Myanmar and other United Nations agencies. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have all been consulted on issues relating to their mandates. Other specialized agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS), the United Nations *Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO)) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS),

have been closely involved as executing agencies in HDI and they are fully engaged in the ongoing consultative processes for the extended phase.

12. A project formulation mission, comprising experienced consultants and with representation from some United Nations specialized agencies and international and national NGOs, was fielded in October 1995 to develop a formulation framework for continuing activities under HDI and to identify and develop feasible project activities. The mission has carried out its task strictly within the framework of Governing Council decision 93/21. The mission has undertaken extensive consultations at all levels in Myanmar, particularly at the village and township levels, and in direct meetings with community-based organizations and village people. Local authorities have also been consulted at the village and township levels. Consultations have also taken place with NGOs, United Nations specialized agencies, project personnel, and diplomatic representatives resident in Myanmar and with the Government to obtain their cooperation in the implementation of project activities.

V. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE: CONTINUING ACTIVITIES

A. Recommendations for future assistance: key considerations

13. Several key factors have determined the nature and content of the proposals to continue activities under HDI that are being submitted to the Executive Board for its consideration.

14. All proposed projects are within the framework of Governing Council decision 93/21. These projects are expected to address critical issues in the areas of: primary health care (including the control and reduction of malaria and leprosy); the environment; HIV/AIDS; training and education; and food security. They will continue to address in particular the humanitarian and basic human needs of the people of Myanmar.

15. The current project structure is being largely maintained, as recommended by the project formulation mission, and has been modified pragmatically with the twin aims of consolidation and gains in efficiency. It is necessary, especially in the interest of sustainability, not to disrupt and disturb the momentum that has been generated through current project activities. Project personnel have been in their assigned tasks only for periods ranging from 12 to 18 months; evolving working relationships, if drastically changed at this point will require yet another fresh start and another period of time for consolidation. Improvements are being effected to increase the level of coordination and interlinkages among project activities. Particular attention to township and village-level coordination and a redefined role for township programme assistants are expected to be key features in a reformed management structure.

16. Within the overall framework of current approaches, adjustments and modifications are planned in the range and content of project activities, where appropriate. These changes will be directed at targeting the benefits of project interventions more directly to the poorer, vulnerable and high-risk groups of the population. They will also be focused more on appropriate income-generating activities, especially for women. Improvements will also be effected

to generate a greater impact at the grass-roots level. Particular attention will be paid to achieving greater cost-effectiveness and enhancing sustainability.

17. The experience of HDI so far calls for greater flexibility in the design and implementation arrangements for projects to ensure continued and effective response to changing needs at the village level. This will also enable more efficient participation by local people in needs assessment and in the implementation of activities, including social and resource mobilization. An important consideration for the extended phase will be to stimulate such flexible and participatory approaches. It is expected that civil society organizations, including NGOs, will be active partners in the design and implementation of HDI activities.

18. Project activities will be concentrated largely in the 14 townships in which they are being currently implemented (apart from primary health care, control and reduction of malaria and leprosy and HIV/AIDS, which are nation-wide activities). Approximately six additional townships will be included, of which two will be in complementary relationships with UNHCR, to assist returnees to reintegrate themselves into the development process. Consultations are also being undertaken with UNDCP to undertake appropriate activities in accordance with Governing Council decision 93/21. Within the 14 townships, additional villages will be included in project activities from which they have so far been excluded. It is expected that the extended phase of HDI will benefit a larger number of poorer people, especially as a result of the inclusion of new villages in currently operational townships.

B. Project proposals

19. The projects proposed are intended to provide a focused and coherent response to important humanitarian and environmental needs in Myanmar. The limited resources available to UNDP can meet only a small part of these needs and are being targeted to villages and townships in those divisions and states in the country that are particularly deprived, suffer most from acute poverty and are most vulnerable to environmental hazards. While each project will be in the form of a set of discrete activities, it is evident that there are groups and clusters within them that require interconnections. In the design and implementation of all of these projects, continued close cooperation and collaboration will be ensured with United Nations specialized agencies, and especially with UNICEF and UNFPA in areas such as education, water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, the control and reduction of malaria and leprosy and iodine deficiency.

20. Having taken note of these background concerns and considerations, especially the findings of the project formulation mission, the Administrator proposes the following thematic and sectoral structure for project activities.

1. Human development and humanitarian needs

21. A cluster of projects, focused primarily on enhancing levels of human development, and also targeted to meeting critical humanitarian needs, will aim at implementing Governing Council decision 93/21 in these areas.

22. The project on education will be focused entirely on basic and non-formal education. Two projects in education in HDI have generated a momentum in many villages in the seven townships, by a visible impact in terms of renovated school buildings and textbook and pencil supplies. It has also organized training for primary school teachers, and school-garden activities to improve nutrition and generate revenues for school maintenance. The proposed project will continue these activities in a larger number of villages, and will emphasize the training component even further. Non-formal education will be a new key feature in the project, enabling larger numbers of people to benefit from educational processes.

23. The project on water and sanitation will continue to build on the work of HDI in providing villages with inexpensive systems of access to water, based on needs assessment through a community-participatory approach and through cost-sharing. The project will aim at taking up a much larger number of villages in the seven townships, applying a tested methodology that has had a high degree of success not only in Myanmar but in other countries.

24. The project on HIV/AIDS will be linked to the regional programme based in New Delhi and will focus particularly on the socio-economic causes of the problem, which is assuming alarming proportions in Myanmar. It will aim at strengthening national courses and the programme of action to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS through a clearer understanding of the transmission mechanisms. The project will work in collaboration with the national programme for HIV/AIDS prevention.

25. Activities of current projects in the control and reduction of malaria and leprosy will be incorporated into the ongoing project on primary health care. In collaboration with UNICEF, attention will be focused on iodine deficiency, which is having a significant impact on the mental development of children and the welfare of women, particularly in the border areas. This project, concentrating on the Dry Zone, Ayeryawaddy Delta, and the border areas, will continue the work of HDI in meeting the basic health needs of the people in these regions.

2. Environment and food security

26. Improvements in environmental and natural resources management practices are urgently called for in the project areas of HDI in view of their fragile and highly vulnerable resource systems. Food and fuelwood requirements, particularly of the poorer groups of people, can be met sustainably only through greater attention to resource management practices in these areas. Environmental resources have been rapidly depleted as a result of population pressures and increasing demands for consumption.

27. A project in the Dry Zone of Myanmar will address agriculture and forestry issues, focusing on the poorer farmers and landless people, with the objective of creating income-generating activities through improved access to land, water and forest resources. The innovative work already under way to develop and market highly energy efficient wood stoves, easing the pressure on depleting wood stocks and reducing the burden on women in particular, will be continued. This project will bring together the activities currently undertaken under two separate projects on agriculture and forestry.

28. The watershed management project in the Shan State, building on the achievements of its predecessor, will further develop innovative techniques in watershed management, adopting community participatory approaches and building a community consensus on the utilization of watershed forests. Related income-generating opportunities that will be stimulated should ease the pressure on forest exploitation through enabling poor people to have access to alternative incomes.

29. The project on mangroves in the Ayeryawaddy Delta has initiated a systemic approach in rehabilitating the extensive mangrove habitations of the region, which have been largely destroyed due to the uncontrolled exploitation of forest and aquatic resources. The project will continue to build on these approaches, involving local communities in mangrove management. This project has been particularly beneficial to some of the poorest households in the country and is replenishing a unique environmental resource.

30. The two projects on watersheds and mangroves constitute integrated approaches to sustainable environmental management.

3. Intersectoral projects

31. Three projects of an intersectoral nature, encompassing environmental and human development concerns, are proposed for early implementation. These are clearly in line with Governing Council decision 93/21 and are important in ensuring the impact and sustainability of activities undertaken in most projects.

32. The quick impact projects that were implemented in the Chin and Rakhine States under HDI were a response to urgent needs that required immediate attention in these areas. They will now be redesigned to obtain a more sustainable impact. An integrated approach will be adopted in a combined project that will include a range of interventions across several sectors (education, environment, water and sanitation, food security and income-generation). The project will aim at building capacities at the grass-roots level through participatory approaches and will also address the humanitarian needs of vulnerable and high-risk groups in these deprived areas.

33. Governing Council decision 93/21 clearly requires that project activities should have "grass-roots level impact in a sustainable manner". To ensure such an outcome, several of the ongoing projects have included important components of micro-credit, especially for the very poor. It is feasible to mobilize the support of international NGOs and civil society organizations in developing a

range of activities, particularly in micro-credit, to enable poor and vulnerable groups to undertake activities for their well-being and welfare. Women in poor households would be the primary beneficiaries from a project of this kind.

34. The task of UNDP in continuing to implement HDI will be complex and continuous and will demand a range of skills to monitor, evaluate and analyse micro-level interventions and to stimulate sustainable grass-roots impact. It is therefore proposed that the current programme support project be modified to undertake several critical functions for the overall management of HDI. It will enable monitoring and evaluation through the current cadre of better-trained township programme assistants. Key critical analytical activities will be undertaken to understand more precisely region- and township-specific factors that impinge on poverty and to enable relevant technical interventions to be designed. The project will also selectively examine those issues that have a direct bearing on its portfolio of village-based activities, with a view to enabling greater sustainability. The project will also facilitate common training arrangements, and capacity-building for NGOs.

VI. ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

35. An unallocated amount of $52.076 million from fifth cycle IPF resources (1992-1996) is available for programming. In its decision 93/21 the Governing Council authorized an expenditure of $18 million from fifth cycle IPF resources in addition to reallocated IPF resources from the fourth cycle. This amounted to $7.5 million, yielding a total sum of $25.5 million over an 18-month period, which represents an annualized authorized expenditure of $17 million. It is anticipated that total annual expenditures will be maintained at the same level of $17 million per year.

VII. EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION

36. The Executive Board may wish to:

(a) Approve continued funding of activities in the sectors previously outlined in Governing Council decision 93/21;

(b) Authorize the Administrator, on a project-by-project basis, to approve projects for a total amount not exceeding $52.076 million during the period 1996-1997;

(c) Authorize the implementation of the approved projects until their completion, with annualized expenditures not exceeding $17 million per year;

(d) Requests the Administrator to submit, at its first regular session 1998, an assessment of the extent to which the assistance provided to Myanmar continues to meet the provisions of present Executive Board decisions, including Governing Council decision 93/21.